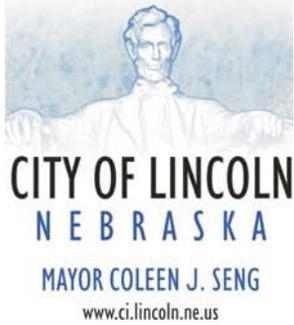


City/County Plan Update



PLANNING DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission continues holding bi-weekly working sessions to craft an updated Comprehensive Plan (CP) and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) document. These working sessions are scheduled through the month of August. A full draft CP/LRTP document is anticipated to be released in late September. A number of community open houses are being scheduled to occur immediately after the Planning Commission's draft edition is issued. The Planning Commission has tentatively set Wednesday, October 18 as the date for its formal public hearing on the draft Comp Plan, beginning at 3 p.m. in the Hearing Chambers of the County-City Building.



While the draft text remains under review and subject to change, the Planning Commission's work-in-progress document reflects some of the following changes:

- ♦ **Sustained Urban Growth** – Expand Lincoln by 52 square miles by the year 2030. This reflects a 60 percent increase in the size of the urban area over the City's present corporate boundaries. Nearly 70 percent (36.7 sq. mi.) of the 25-year Tier I area presently is shown for development during the first 12 years of the planning period. However, this designation requires further discussion, because expanding public services at that rate is too expensive.
- ♦ **Street & Highway Improvements** – Program nearly \$2 billion in street and highway improvements and maintenance over the next 24 years. The present proposal calls for the completion of the Antelope Valley roadways and South and East Beltways, with new sections of O Street, Highway 2, and Cornhusker Highway proposed for widening to 6 lanes. New funding sources will need to be found to complete this program.
- ♦ **Neighborhood Center Guidelines** – Clarify the size and role of neighborhood centers in relation to single "Big Box" retailers. The present Planning Commission recommendation calls for neighborhood centers of 150,000 square feet, with a third to half of this space in anchor stores. If a specific proposed neighborhood center met certain incentive criteria, the floor area could increase by up to 50 percent. The draft also increases the overall number of Community Centers and adds new "Highway-Oriented Commercial" and "Mixed-Use Office Center" categories.
- ♦ **Health-Planning Partnership** – Incorporate findings of a joint committee of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Board of Health and Planning Commission. Specific goals and recommendations were developed regarding the use and storage of hazardous materials and for pipelines carrying hazardous materials. They are proposed for inclusion in the industrial section of the Comp Plan's chapter on the economy.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

New electronic and computer technology is making it possible for businesses and billboard companies to purchase changeable message signs that have many more features and require less energy to operate than their predecessors of just a decade ago. The City's current sign code permits this new technology for businesses advertising on their premises today, but not for billboards, which advertise products and services that are off-premise. While these signs have become more popular in the past couple of years, staff has received complaints from motorists and residents that some are distracting and annoying due to excessive brightness and animation. Some of these signs may be violating the current code standard for brightness. *(Continued on next page.)*

SIGN

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The company that owns most of the billboards in Lincoln asked staff to look at amending the sign provisions to allow them to install this technology on some of their existing signs. In other communities, billboards using this technology typically are limited to displaying non-animated messages that change 5 times per minute. Staff has reviewed codes in other cities and talked to experts in this sector of the sign industry, and we are proposing changes to allow electronic changeable message signs for billboards and businesses, subject to new limitations on animation and brightness. A Planning Commission public hearing to consider ordinance changes tentatively is scheduled for September 27. Contact Mike DeKalb in our office at 441-6370 or mdekalb@lincoln.ne.gov for more information.

OUTDOOR DINING CHANGES

Earlier this month, Lincoln’s City Council approved amendments to the zoning code that we hope will encourage more outdoor dining in the city.

Restaurant owners look at outdoor dining along the street as a form of advertising as well as more revenue, and we think it makes for a livelier and more pedestrian-friendly city. Some local restaurants have been unable to offer outdoor dining because it is not permitted along the street in the front yard setback area or because the operator is unable to add more parking spaces on the lot. The code was not clear on what outdoor dining means, where it is permitted, and whether or not it triggers the need for more parking.

The changes approved by the City Council:

- › define outdoor dining as including both open-air seating as well as semi-enclosed areas;

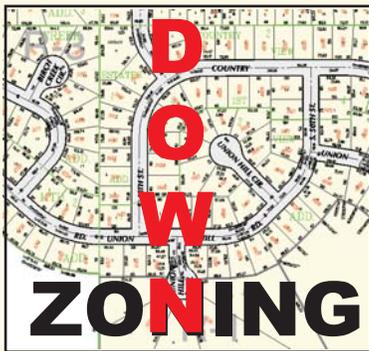
- › allow outdoor dining “by right” as an accessory use in any zoning district that allows restaurants;

- › permit outdoor dining in required yard areas along streets; and
- › exempt these areas from additional parking requirements.



Sale and service of alcoholic beverages still will be controlled by Special Permit in most zoning districts, meaning that the restaurant owner with approval to sell drinks inside the restaurant will need to expand that approval to serve drinks outdoors, and the Council could

impose size limits, hours of operation, or other conditions in some cases to assure compatibility with other nearby uses. If you have any questions about these changes, contact Tom Cajka in our office at 441-5662 or tcajka@lincoln.ne.gov.



In the past several years, the City Council has reviewed and approved eight requests by neighborhood associations to change the zoning designation in their neighborhoods to a more restrictive classification. Staff and the Planning Commission generally have supported these requests as conforming to the Comprehensive Plan, which recognizes the importance of a zoning and land use pattern that encourages a stable investment climate attractive to current and prospective homeowners.

The Planning Commission decided to have a committee of its members review the current procedures for handling these unique applications and consider possible changes. Proposals include a required neighborhood meeting before the Commission hearing on these cases, a longer period for notification of the Commission hearings on these cases, and providing more information to owners about the implications of downzoning.

The committee presented its recommendations to the rest of the Commission last month, and the Commission voted to include most of the recommendations in a report that has been sent to the City Council. The two boards are expected to meet later this month to discuss these recommendations.

In the meantime, the attention to downzoning has resulted in applications being filed for Planning Commission hearings by several neighborhood associations. Staff also is attempting to address one of the key impacts of downzoning under the current ordinance – the labeling of some properties as “non-standard” – with proposed amendments. The Planning Commission is expected to consider these proposed amendments on September 13.

Contact Steve Henrichsen in our office at 441-6374 or shenrichsen@lincoln.ne.gov for more information.



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